



FORUM. Revista Departamento de Ciencia Política
ISSN: 2216-1775
ISSN: 2216-1767
forum_med@unal.edu.co
Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Colombia

Revilla-Blanco**, Marisa; Molina-Sánchez***, Carlos
Cycle of Protest and Changes in Spanish Party System: 15M, Mareas and New Parties*
FORUM. Revista Departamento de Ciencia Política, no. 20, 2021, July-December, pp. 206-232
Universidad Nacional de Colombia
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15446/frdcp.n20.88762>

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Cycle of Protest and Changes in Spanish Party System: 15M, Mareas and New Parties*

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<https://doi.org/10.15446/frdcp.n20.88762>


Abstract

In this paper we intend to analyse the political consequences of the cycle of protest (2011-2016) in Spain, this is, the recent cycle of mobilizations starting with the 15M *indignados* movement. We consider that there is a link between the cycle of protest and the political changes that have occurred. First, we run a correlation analysis between the number of demonstrations and the electoral changes. Then, we analyse the profiles of protesters and that of voters of the new parties. Our focus is set on changes such as the breakdown of the two-party system and the emergence of new political parties with parliamentarian representation. Approaching through different causal mechanisms, we conclude that both events can be analysed as political consequences of the Spanish cycle of protest.

Keywords: social movements; (new) political parties; social change; political conflicts; Spain; Podemos; 15M/*Indignados*.

* **Article received:** July 1, 2020 / **Accepted:** November 30, 2020 / **Modified:** December 14, 2020. This article is the result of research carried out without any external financing. We thank the careful revision carried out by blind evaluators whose comments have contributed to improving the final version of this paper.

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How to cite this article:

Revilla-Blanco, M. & Molina-Sánchez, C. (2021). Cycle of Protest and Changes in Spanish Party System: 15M, Mareas and New Parties. *FORUM. Revista Departamento Ciencia Política*, 20, 206-232. <https://doi.org/10.15446/frdcp.n20.88762>



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Ciclo de protesta y cambios en el sistema de partidos español: 15M, Mareas y nuevos partidos

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es analizar las consecuencias políticas del ciclo de protesta de 2011-2016 en España; es decir, el ciclo de movilización que comenzó con la movilización del 15M y los Indignados. Establecemos que existe un vínculo directo entre el ciclo de protesta y los cambios políticos que ocurrieron. Se presentan dos análisis: por un lado, la relación entre número de manifestaciones y los cambios electorales; por otro, las semejanzas entre los perfiles de los manifestantes y de los votantes de los nuevos partidos. Los cambios que más nos interesan son la ruptura del sistema bipartidista y la emergencia de nuevos partidos políticos que logran obtener representación parlamentaria. Utilizando distintos mecanismos causales, concluimos que ambos eventos se pueden interpretar como consecuencias políticas del ciclo español de protesta.

Palabras clave: movimientos sociales; (nuevos) partidos políticos; cambio social; conflictos políticos; España; Podemos; 15M/*Indignados*.

Introduction

The emergence of the Spanish 15M/*Indignados* movement (May 2011) and activism for social rights and against the privatization of public services –the so-called *mareas* or ‘tides’– between 2012 and 2016 represented what we define as a major cycle of mobilization in recent Spanish history. As Sampredo and Lobera stated, *Indignados* were “[both] an expression of a widespread erosion of the hegemonic transition culture and a new social and creative space for challenge and reform” (2014, p. 63). We focus our analysis on, first, a specific effect in the hegemonic transition culture: the breakdown of the two-party system and the hegemonic position of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and Popular Party (PP, conservative) as the only parties which could ensure governability. And, second, in one characteristic of this creative space which is the emergence of new parties competing for increased representation shares. We will sustain that these changes are political consequences of those mobilizations. We argue that the breakdown in the Spanish two-party system was expressed, first, socially –during -and through- the cycle of mobilization which has been publicly visible since 15M– and then, electorally, revealing the ‘exhaustion’ of the “two-party dominance” (Garrido, 2017) –stronger than ever between 2000 and 2008–, both in Parliamentary representation and among the electorate.

We define those two problems, the end of the two-party system and the emergence of new and successful political parties, as the core issues of this paper, mainly, due to two reasons. First, the two-party system has been institutionalised (Mainwaring, 1998) in the Spanish political system since the first elections (1977 and 1979) held in the democratic transition. Second, the constituencies of the parties which have emerged for General Elections in 2015-2016 and 2019 –mainly, *Podemos*, *Ciudadanos* and *VOX*– are much younger than those of the “traditional” parties.

The second decade of the 21st century started in Spain with these mobilizations confronting the moderate left-wing government which launched austerity policies in 2010, stating clearly that “they don’t represent us” –*No nos representan*. This decade finishes with the formation, for the first time in Spain, of a coalition government. Paradoxically enough, this same party (PSOE) has been ruling since January 2020 with *Podemos*, the party which emerged following the path of 15M.

According to the literature on political consequences of social movements, which identifies three main effects at structural level: 1) the extension of democratic rights and practices; 2) the formation of new political parties; and 3) the setting of policy agendas (Amenta et al., 2010), we establish our interest in the analysis of the second: the formation of new political parties and changes in the constituencies –and their success obtaining political representation– as a consequence of this cycle of mobilization.

In the following sections, first, we introduce the political context in which mobilizations took place. Second, we discuss the theoretical model on political consequences of social movements that we apply to the shifting political Spanish context in this period, and then we run a correlation analysis to relate the degree of mobilization to the emergence of new parties in each Spanish constituency in the electoral cycle. Finally, we discuss the characteristics of the two-party system and the main changes in political representation as well as the changes in the constituencies of political parties through general elections held during this decade.

Spanish Political Context for Mobilization

On May 12th, 2010, Prime Minister Zapatero –Socialist Party, PSOE– presented his government’s first package of budget cuts to Parliament:

Head down, the president walks into Parliament with a short speech in his right hand. He opens a white folder and reads 16 pages of bad news. Shaken by seven days of economic instability and a week of financial unrest that placed Spain on the precipice, José Luis

Rodríguez Zapatero presented to Parliament “a very cruel reality” and announces, in 120 seconds, nine “necessary and fair” measures to get the country out of the hole it is in; nine black bullet points between pages 11 and 12 that represent the most profound social budget cuts in recent Spanish history. (Romero, 2010)

These cuts reduced public spending by 15 000 million Euros, affecting public sector salaries, pensions, pharmaceutical spending, Official Development Assistance –600 million–, and so on. This was immediately followed by a period of street demonstrations against the cuts. A year later, in 2011, street protests involving thousands of people were organised by a citizen’s platform known as *Democracia Real Ya* across several Spanish cities. Following one demonstration some activists decided to camp out in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol. This might have gone unnoticed had it not been heavily suppressed by police (Garijo, Quesada & Santaaulalia, 2011), which drew media attention and provoked indignation among a large section of the public. This produced more spontaneous calls for further action through social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc., which led to daily protests that resulted in a massive camp in Puerta del Sol. In the following days, camps were established in many major Spanish cities and became a global milestone, a point of no return in the cycle of mobilization. Some camps continued after the local elections held on May 22nd, –among them, Acampada Sol in Madrid and Acampada BCN in Plaza Cataluña, Barcelona– until they peacefully disbanded in June 2011. However, the message of social distrust of politics, political parties and the financial system has been strongly rooted since then.

These protests known as 15M,¹ or the *revolución indignada* –outraged revolution–, constituted the expression of “outrage” as a social force that was mobilised at the 15M camps, as well as in the later cycle of protests during 2012-2014, which included the *mareas ciudadanas* –“tides”, in which different colours represented specific protest groups: white, related to the health services; green to public education; violet to women’s rights, and so on. The ‘outrage’ was also expressed in the ideological reconfiguration of specific social groups, which distanced themselves from the political positions of the two main parties –PP, the conservative party, and PSOE, the socialist party. This shift then became a global criticism of the Spanish political system. Hutter, Kriesi and Vidal’s stand is that “the key driving forces of change are social movements and political parties that forcefully combine opposition to austerity and ‘old’ politics” (2018, p. 3). “Old” politics characterised in Spain by the closure of the two main parties.

1. For the analysis of 15M, we recommend Adell (2011), Castañeda (2012), Calvo (2013), Minguijón and Pac, (2013), Portos (2016).

Precisely, ‘closure’ of the political institutions to citizen’s demands and grievances became one of the most salient characteristics of the political response to the economic crisis. When in 2010 Rodríguez Zapatero imposed the budget cuts, he abandoned the policies that his own government had promoted during its first period of government (2004-2008) by extending social rights –such as support for maternity leave and the unemployed. The causes and effects of this policy shift were poorly explained to citizens, and the public was left shocked. Consequently, at the following General Election in November 2011, the PSOE lost three million votes, and the PP won the election. However, Mariano Rajoy’s –prime minister from 2011 until 2018, PP– government went even further in imposing new cuts and austerity, whilst showing little interest in cracking down on political corruption and instead seeking to cover up scandals. Both governments applied the “Merkelian orthodoxy” that led to “economic hecatomb” (Castells, 2016, p. 168). After 2011, both ruling (PP) and opposition parties lost social support, being Spain the only European country in which this occurred as response to the 2007 crisis (Castells, 2016, p. 170).

Podemos –*We can*– emerged onto the Spanish political scene in the campaign for the EU parliamentary (EP) elections in May 2014. This new party articulated its political identity based on the political agenda introduced by social movements since 2011. *Podemos*’ success in this election reconfigured the electorate in Spain.² In January 2015, *Ciudadanos* (*C’s*), a party created in 2005 in Catalonia by a platform of intellectuals concerned about the spread of independence movements to contest Catalanian Elections, jumped to central politics scenario with a strong discourse against corruption.

In May 2015, local and regional elections brought new actors and issues to local governments and regional Parliaments, and the December 2015 General Election confirmed the fragmentation of the electorate among four political parties: two of them new parties on the national stage –*Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*–. This was confirmed at the June 2016 General Election following the failure of parliamentary groups to form a government. As Orriols and Cordero put it: “The beneficiaries of the collapse of the two-party system from 2015 were not the existing minor parties (which also suffered substantial losses) but two new state-wide parties: *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*. The emergence of these two political formations radically changed the Spanish party system, which moved from a two-party system to a multi-party system” (2016, p. 471).

2. “... until the EP elections in May 2014, the greatest beneficiaries of the PP’s decline [and PSOE’s, we would add] were the BAI options (blank vote, abstention and indecision)” (Orriols & Cordero 2016, p. 476).

Governability problems had just emerged in Spain: In October 2016, Pedro Sánchez stepped down as PSOE's general secretary and resigned as Congressman and leader of the Socialist parliamentary group, due to his reluctance to support the formation of government with Mariano Rajoy (PP) as Prime Minister. Without repudiation from Sánchez, Mariano Rajoy's government was inaugurated on 29 October. Less than two years later, in June 2018 Mariano Rajoy lost the motion of censure presented by *Podemos*, and Pedro Sánchez inaugurated a new government with *Podemos* as parliamentary support. General elections have been held twice during 2019 –April and November. In this last electoral cycle, a new party from the radical right has emerged: VOX –first competing in 2018 Andalusian Autonomic Elections–. Now, after November electoral results, Sánchez leads a coalition government –PSOE + *Podemos*–, and VOX is the third force in Spanish Congress.

Theoretical Framework: Political Consequences of Social Movements

A significant number of studies allow us to establish the importance of the subject and the problems involved in analysing social movements' political outcomes.³ Being so, nevertheless, the difficulties of considering the political consequences of social movements require further explanation. First, linking specific political outcomes of a process –e.g. transformations that affect political actors, institutions, decisions...– to concrete social movements' *strategies and actions* can result in an arduous task, because "...political consequences are external to and not under the direct control of SMOs" (Amenta et al., 2010, p. 287).

Second, the political consequences of social movements cannot always be related to their *goals*. In theoretical debates this is referred to as "unintended consequences" (Andrews 1997). The exclusive focus on a social movement's agenda may limit the analysis by "excluding the broader consequences of movements, which are ultimately essential to understanding the dynamic development of the struggle" (Giugni & Bosi, 2012, p. 22).

Finally, political processes include so many actors, institutions, and interactions that a methodological problem might arise when trying to establish *causal links* between a movement and some outcomes.

So, even though the theoretical and analytical debate has not fully responded to the question about "whether movements are generally effective or how influential they are" in the political process (Amenta et al., 2010, p. 287), considering the number of

3. For some interesting reviews and studies on this issue, see: Giugni (1998), Giugni (1999), Tilly (1999), Kolb (2007), Amenta et al (2010), Bolger (2016), Bosi, Giugni and Uba (2016), Uba and Romanos (2016), Aguilar and Romanos (2018).

actors, strategies and situations involved in political processes, we cannot realistically expect the question to have a single, comprehensive answer. Eventually, the response will depend on the movement involved, the political conditions, and/or the strategies deployed by the movement and the other actors. But, even so, as Kolb stated, there is enough common ground to establish a partial theory (Kolb, 2007).

As shown by the literature relating to the political consequences of social movements, these problems can be managed.⁴ For instance, explaining “through which processes social movement activities can result in political change” (Kolb, 2007, pp. 1-3).

In this analysis of political consequences, we follow the “partial theory of social movements and political change” proposed by Kolb (2007), as we acknowledge this work as the most complete understanding of causal mechanisms and typology of outcomes. Starting with the latter, Kolb distinguishes two types of political outcomes: 1) substantive political outcomes, this is the establishment, modification, or construction of public and collective goods—including five different types of impacts: agenda; alternatives; policy; implementation, or, finally, goods. 2) procedural outcomes which link social movements to institutional outcomes. In this case, Kolb analyses, first, procedural changes in the relationship between social movements and a political sub-institution—consultation; negotiation, or formal recognition—and, second, intra-institutional changes, this is, changes in the structure and/or purpose of political sub-institutions—extension of voting rights; strengthening Parliamentary representation; creation of Governmental Agencies; emergence of new political parties.

Related to the causal mechanisms of political change, Kolb introduces five mechanisms: 1) disruption—a means of creating negative inducements; 2) public preference—the mobilization of public opinion might affect policy makers’ response by shifting their own policy preferences; 3) gaining access to the political process—basically, electoral empowerment; 4) judicial—the use of the political power of the courts by social movements on their behalf; and 5) shifting the scale of process to international politics.

For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the political consequences of the Spanish cycle of protest, and predominantly, on the issue of the emergence of new political parties because of the cycle of mobilization.

Political Consequences

Based on Kolb’s model, we argue that there were three outstanding political consequences of the 15M mobilization, and the following cycle of mobilizations. First, a substantive

4. For a discussion of recent literature on the subject, see Giugni, Bosi and Uba (2013). Also, Aguilar and Romanos (2018), for the analysis of the 15M movement; and Bosi (2016), for the revision of the IRA volunteers.

political outcome: agenda impact. As Diego Beas proposed, “the *indignados* succeeded in revealing a side of Spain that only few thought existed: a resilient and politicised public willing to get involved to change the modus operandi of the system” (Beas, 2011). And changing the modus operandi of the system required –as the mobilizations sought–, confronting the content and effects of anti-austerity policies; to reveal the intricacies of corruption; to demand changes in political representation. All of this strongly suggested that the PP and the PSOE were the obstacles to change. The cycle of mobilization introduced into the agenda the problem of political corruption as a system and the questioning of the Spanish democratic system, including the reconsideration of the transition to democracy.

Second, two procedural outcomes, which were both related to intra-institutional change: first, the emergence of new political parties, and then the strengthening of political representation –Parliamentary and local. Proportional systems present a better opportunity for the emergence of new parties due to its better chances of electoral success (Hutter, Kriesi & Lorenzini, 2018). *Podemos* represents the most successful translation of ideological reconfiguration into electoral alternatives, being the first one to obtain electoral success in the 2014 European Election (Lobera, 2015) but it has not been the only one.

Analysing Causal Mechanisms

Disruption appears to be the key causal mechanism that explains the linkage between the mobilization cycle and political outcomes in this case: “...the rather constricted and exclusionary bounds of the Spanish polity, at least as it has been understood by many mainline political actors, often encourage the adoption of a disruptive approach by protesters...” (Fishman & Everson, 2016, p. 8). The “closure” of Spanish political institutions and the criminalization of protest showed that the streets were the place to express discontent, frustration and demands for change –“disruption” in Fishman & Everson, (2016). Confrontation was the mechanism employed by *Mareas* and social movements such as *Rodea el Congreso* when repression and criminalization was the only response from Rajoy’s government to the mobilizations; that is, when options for negotiation were completely closed.

However, following disruption, a second causal mechanism is needed to understand the whole process: gaining political access through electoral empowerment changing electoral representation.

Working on these two explanatory causal mechanisms requires us to define the way that social movement strength is to be analysed. We choose to use the amount of (protest) mobilization to measure the strength of the movements through a specific indicator: the extent of protest mobilization (Kolb, 2007, pp. 40-41).

We work on two premises: first, the variation in the number of mobilizations is related to the appearance of new parties and to the number of votes for these parties; and second, given the link between mobilization and new parties, their constituencies should share similar social characteristics. On this basis, we build on two hypotheses:

H1. The higher the number of mobilizations in any constituency, the greater the probability of the appearance of new parties obtaining representation, and seats in municipalities or parliaments.

H2. The profiles of people who mobilise and the profiles of new parties' voters should share characteristics and differ from the profiles of PP and PSOE's voters.

Therefore, we relate the degree of mobilization to the number of new parties in each Spanish constituency in the electoral cycle –that is, the local election 2011; EU parliamentary election 2014; local election 2015 and General Election 2015 and 2016– and we analyse the changes in the constituencies of political parties in this period.

Methodology and Construction of Variables

The data regarding demonstrations and mobilization have been collected from the *Yearly statistics of the Spanish Ministry of Interior*.⁵ These statistics include information on demonstrations collected from 2007 to 2015. The year 2007 is the starting point of the cycle of protest and 2012 is the year of the explosion of the cycle, demonstrations reaching up to its highest numbers. A total of 44.233 demonstrations according to Home Office's yearly statistics. Meanwhile 2015 is an electoral year where the political changes become a reality. On this point, it becomes necessary to state the limitations of using this data. The first limitation is that all mobilizations are accounted, no matter the size. So, small ones tend to be overrepresented in the yearly statistics. Due to the difference between years with almost no contention –4000 demonstrations– and those years of the great cycle –40 000 demonstrations–, this overrepresentation can be accepted as we believe that it shows the great variety of topics and the importance of the cycle of protest. Another limitation is the data regarding *Cataluña* and *País Vasco* because they are not accounted for in the *Yearly statistics of the Spanish Ministry of Interior*, since 2012 and 2013, respectively.

Political data, regarding General Elections and local elections as well as vote information or appearance of new political parties, has been collected from the official pages offering electoral results –*Ministerio del Interior/Home Office*.⁶

5. Demonstration information: <http://www.interior.gob.es/web/archivos-y-documentacion/anuario-estadistico-de-2014>

6. Political Information: <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/infoelectoral/min/home.html>

The variables have been constructed *ad hoc* taking in to account the hypothesis, the theory, and the data available. There are 10 different variables: four independent and six dependent.⁷ The independent variables have been constructed by drawing on demonstration data, because we understand that social movements and mobilizations have contributed to change political representation as well as producing an opportunity that has facilitated the appearance of new political parties. The fourth independent variable represents a control variable and is constructed from registered unemployment rates from the Spanish unemployment services. The other six variables are dependent. Three of them correspond to municipal elections held in May 2015, while the other three relate to the General Election that took place in December 2015.

Correlations Analysis

We conducted a linear regression analysis after the collection of data and the construction of variables. This is summarised in Figure 1, where the most relevant correlations that have been found during the statistical analysis are shown. All independent variables have shown a positive correlation except for the second independent variable (INVAR2⁸). One point that must be noted is that the other three independent variables have had positive correlations, mainly with dependent variables relating to the emergence of new parties.

Figure 1. Summary of Positive Results from Correlation Analysis

Relevant Correlations			
INVAR1	Pearson's correlation	.551** (DV1NP)	.545** (DV3%NV)
	R ²	0.304	0.297
INVAR3	Pearson's correlation	.569** (DV1NP)	.625** (DV1NPGen)
	R ²	0.324	0.391
INVAR4	Pearson's correlation	.683** (DV1NP)	.601** (DV3%NVGen)
	R ²	0.466	0.361
** The correlation is significant at level 0.01 (bilateral). N=52 Spanish provinces			

Source: Author's elaboration.

7. For the description of the variables, see Annex.

8. INVAR2 represents the second part of the mobilization cycle that goes from 2012 to 2015. The mobilizations in these years have decreased from their highest point (2012). Therefore, the lack of correlation is positive. If there had been a correlation for this variable, it would have falsified the other existing correlations.

The variable (DV1NP) symbolises the number of new parties represented in City Councils after the 2015 municipal elections, and it correlates positively with all the independent variables of mobilizations –INVAR1 and INVAR3– except for independent variable number 2. It also correlates with the unemployment rate variable (INVAR4).

Independent variable INVAR1 correlates positively as well with dependent variable DV3%NV which represents vote percentage to new parties obtaining representation in City Councils 2015. The last two relevant correlations are connected to General Election variables. The DV1NPGen stands for the number of new political parties represented in national parliament and correlates with INVAR 3. And the DV3%NVGen dependent variable stands for vote percentage to new parties obtaining representation in Spanish parliament for 2015 General election, correlating with INVAR 4.

The statistical analysis showed that effectively there is a correlation between the number of demonstrations and the appearance of new political parties obtaining electoral representation. Another limitation of the correlation analysis is that *per se* it is spurious, it needs to be explained and supported by other evidence. So, in order to sum up more evidence of that relation between mobilizations and political change, we have conducted a cleavage analysis as well as reviewed it and compare it with existing research on the topic.

The data to determine the profiles of the activists, people who have participated actively in the cycle of mobilization have been collected from the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS, Centre of Sociological Research), specifically the post electoral surveys taken after the General elections of 2015 and 2019 and monthly surveys called *Barómetros* with specific question on attending demonstrations as well.

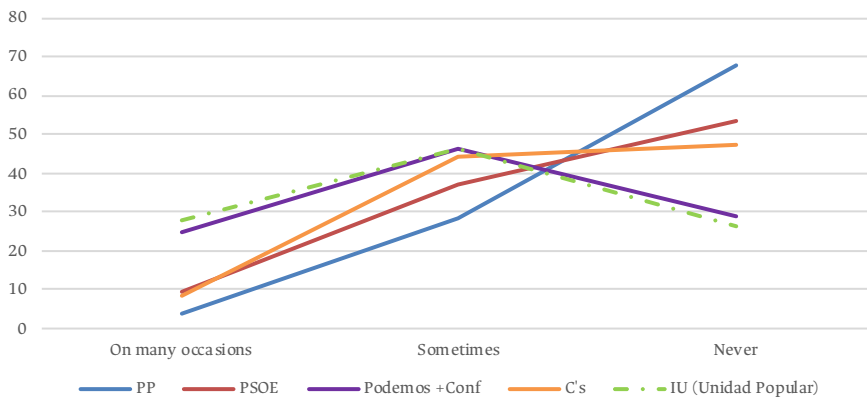
Activists⁹

All kinds of people participated in camps, assemblies and demonstrations all over Spain during 15M. Although many of the processes before 15M came from within the university environment, such as *Anonymous*, *Juventud Sin Futuro* –"Youth Without Future"– or *Ponte en Pie* –"Stand Up"–, the movement was widely welcomed. Public opinion was very positive towards the *indignados* movement. People from a wide variety of backgrounds attended meetings or passed through the squares of Spanish cities, either attracted by the ideas behind the mobilization or just simple curiosity. Even though it was a transversal movement, the

9. Methodological note: All the data analysed have been extracted from the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, from the General Election reports of 2008, 2011 and 2015 and the barometers that include questions about vote and mobilization: October 2007, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014, and 2015. The variables used are: Age; sex; working status, education level; size of municipality. And the questions referred to "vote recall" and "attend to demonstrations".

main profile of people involved in 15M was, young, urban and highly educated¹⁰. Authors such as Calvo (2013), Díez-García (2015), and Betancor and Prieto (2018), defined this profile supported by their own data. Calvo (2013, p. 251), for example, drawing on his research in the camps, said that: “(...) young people with a leftist political orientation stand at the core of this social movement, there are not significant gender differences, and levels of education are very high”. Nevertheless, Anduiza, Crisanchó, and Sabucedo (2013, p. 760) also stated the importance of youth and highest levels of education among participants, but they highlighted that women were more likely to participate. In the subsequent developments between 2011 and the present moment, the protest has extended to a diversity of themes including: employment, housing, healthcare and justice, through a plurality of collectives.

Figure 2. Attend a Demonstration by Vote Recall



Source: CIS 2015 post-electoral.

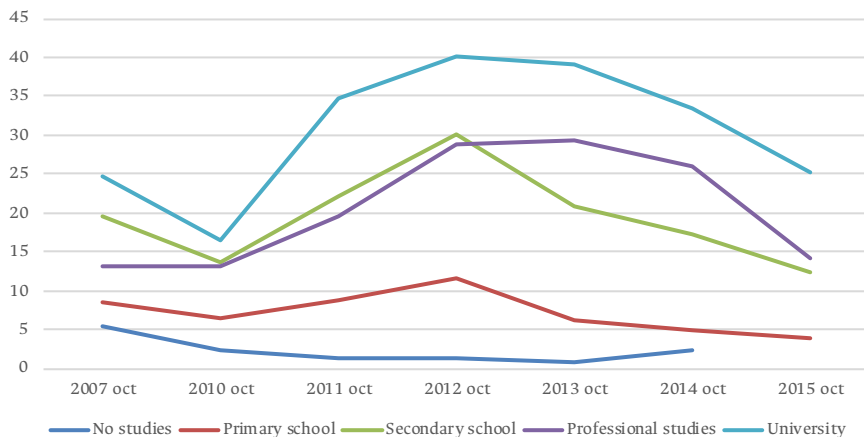
Analysing the activists through their socio-demographic variables it becomes quite clear that they are:

- Mainly people younger than 45 years old but are largely between 18 and 25. This age group, 4-5 years later, are now over 25.
- Highly educated people, mainly with university degrees, followed by professional and secondary school students. These people are probably now in higher levels of education.

10.

- Focusing on the occupation status –Socio-economic condition for CIS and INE– are students, technicians and middle cadres, office and services workers.
- People who attend demonstrations vote for *Podemos* or *Izquierda Unida* –in 2015 post electoral survey, General Election–, the two main parties that form the electoral coalition called *Unidas Podemos*. This by itself could be explained because left wing voters tend to express dissent through demonstrations. But *Ciudadano*'s voters –the other newly emerged party– expressed also to have attended demonstrations on many occasions as well. While voters for PSOE and PP have attended on a lower percentage.

Figure 3. Attend a Demonstration (Last 12 Months) 2005-2015 by Studies



Source: CIS barometers (monthly specific questions) 2007-2015.

Voters' Profiles

In the 2014 European Parliamentary elections *Podemos* obtained 8 % of the votes, making them the fourth political force. Since then, it has become a political phenomenon that has transformed the political “chessboard”. Malanda (2014) performed an analysis of the municipal election results obtained by *Podemos* in relation to the variables available and concluded that “*Podemos* voters in the European elections have an urban profile, with medium-high status, under the age of 60, highly educated, skilled new technology users, left wing sympathisers and with a strong dislike of politics”. This voter profile seems quite like the one outlined by Adell (2011), Calvo (2013), Betancor and Prieto

(2018) regarding the people who participated in the 15M mobilizations. *Podemos* started to become a real alternative that attracted people and inspired hope among a high number of voters. The General Election of December 2015 changed the electoral base of Spanish political parties and has confirmed and deepened Malanda's analysis. The profiles in 2015 General Election are quite like those extracted from the CIS's demonstrations data and evidenced in the data showed by the post-electoral surveys.

- PSOE and PP's main profiles show voters who achieved lower education levels –no studies or basic studies–, are over 55 years old and tend to live in smaller towns –under 10 000 inhabitants.
- On the other hand, *Podemos* and *Ciudadano's* voters profiles have higher education levels –professional and university degrees–, they are also younger, under 34 and 44 respectively. And are more urban, living in cities over 100 000 inhabitants (*Podemos*) and over 400 000 (*Ciudadanos*).

Summarizing the evidence, the rupture in “social bipartisanship” is happening mainly among the youngest cohorts –voters under 34 years old: people who have achieved higher education levels –professional and university studies–, and also urban people –living in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants–, as well as technicians, qualified workers and students. A similar profile offered by authors like Criado-Olmos and Pinta-Sierra (2015) when analysing the data of 2014 European Elections concluded that *Podemos'* electorate is mainly young, leftist and with high education level (2015). While, on the other hand, people who vote for the PP and the PSOE have lower education levels, are over 55 years old, live in smaller towns and might be described as traditional workers –agriculture, manual workers, domestic unpaid workers and retired people.

The appearance of VOX, a far-right party, has changed the composition of the constituencies. This new party has produced some variations in the voter profiles during the last elections. This data comes from the CIS's post-electoral survey of the November 2019 General Election.

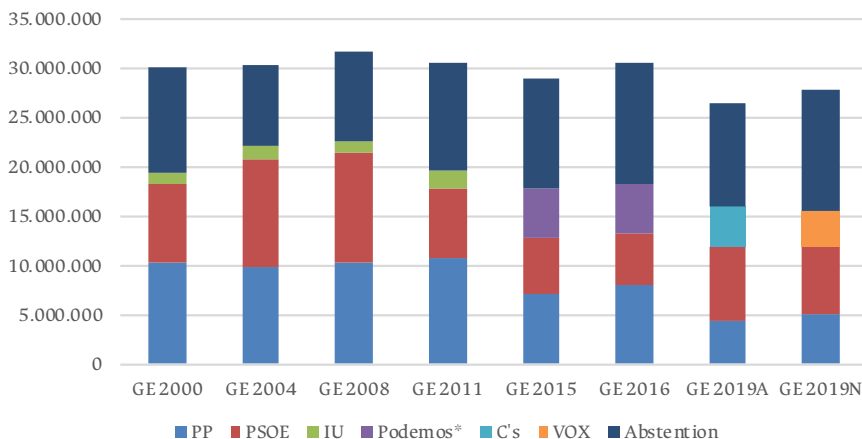
- PSOE: Voters over 55 years old, with a low education level –no studies and basic studies– and living in towns of all sizes. They show similar percentages, except for cities over one million inhabitants.
- PP: Voters over 55 years old, with a low education level –basic studies–, and living in towns with less than 2000 inhabitants, small cities –50 000 to 100 000 people– and big cities –over 1 000 000 people.
- *Unidas Podemos* –Coalition *Podemos* and *Izquierda Unida*–: Voters under 44 years old, with higher education studies –secondary and university studies–, living in medium and big cities –over 100 000 inhabitants.

- *Ciudadanos*: Voters under 54 years old, with a higher education level –secondary studies, professional and university degrees–. Living in towns and cities over 50 000 inhabitants.
- *VOX*: Voters under 44 years old, with secondary and professional studies. The geographic profile is diverse, mainly concentrated in medium size towns – between 2000 and 10 000–, small cities –between 50 000 and 100 000– and medium size cities –100 000 to 400 000.

Discussion: The Shifting Political Context in Spain

Since the first parliamentary elections held in 1977, which signalled the start of the Spanish democratic transition, until the elections held in November 2011, two political parties have typically been in dispute for governance –first, UCD-PSOE, then PSOE-PP–. This “rule” was only broken in the December 2015 election and then, after the failure of the elected parliamentarians to appoint a new Prime Minister, in June 2016. In both elections, no political party came near a relative majority in Congress –not even by combining the seats of two groups– to form a sufficient majority to elect the Prime Minister.

Figure 4. Spanish Electoral Results in General Elections since 2000



Source: Own elaboration on longitudinal electoral results from 2000 until 2019. * Since 2016, Unidas Podemos (Podemos + IU).

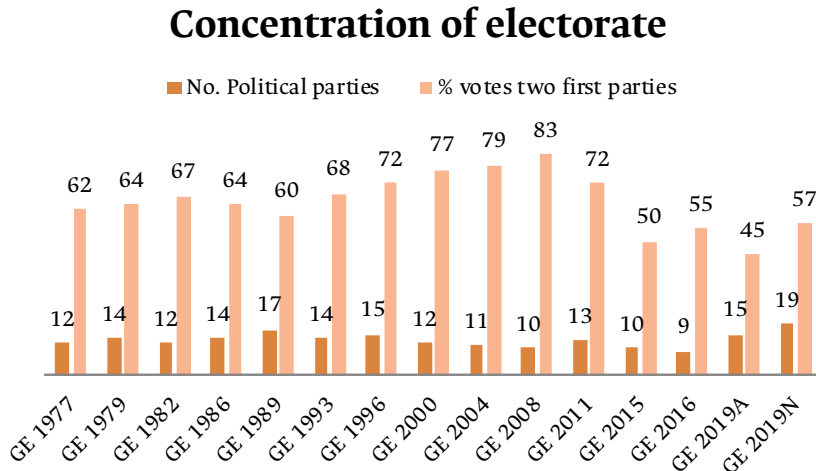
This figure offers some interesting characteristics and facts in recent political representation in Spanish Congress:

- It shows one of the biases of the Spanish Congress voting system: in 2000 and 2011, more than 10 million votes gave access to government through an absolute majority of the Popular Party (PP), but in 2004 and 2008, the Socialist Party (PSOE) needed more than 11 million votes to obtain a simple majority in Congress. Thus, PSOE in both legislatures needed support from other parties in the 'House' to govern. This cannot simply be explained by the turnout level—a general increase in votes means a higher number of votes needed to obtain a majoritarian representation in Congress—, it is mostly an effect of the voting system for Congress. Although it is a proportional system, it contains certain specific characteristics—e.g., the size of the electoral constituency—that benefit political parties whose constituencies are either territorially concentrated or are majoritarian in less populated regions of Spain: i.e., the PP is the most voted-for party in Castilla León, one of the over-represented regions in terms of the number of Congress-persons.
- Abstention rates were over ten million people in the decade 2011-2020, with its lower point in the GE held in April 2019 (28 %) and its higher in November 2019 (34 %).
- Since the GE held in 2015 three parties have competed for the third position in Congress: in 2016, *Podemos*; in April 2019, *Ciudadanos* (C's); in November 2019, VOX.
- *Ciudadanos* lost more than two and a half million in the GE held in November 2019, only seven months after being the third force in votes (GE April 2019). Meanwhile, VOX gained almost one million votes and PP almost seven hundred thousand votes.

The End of the Two-Party System

Figure 5 (below) shows the development of the concentration of votes for the two most voted-for parties in each general election and the number of parties that sought to enter the Congress. The period between the 2000 and 2008 elections is when the two-party system is most remarkable. Meanwhile, the elections held since 2015 represent lower levels of concentration of votes for the two parties—being April 2019 the lowest level—and lower number of parties in the House, with the exception of the Congress resulting from the GE in November 2019 which constitutes the highest number of parties through the entire series.

Figure 5. Percentage of Votes for the Two Leading Parties



Source: Own elaboration, electoral results and number of parties with representation in Congress (number of parties). Indicator “% votes for the two leading parties” (PP and PSOE) is the percentage [sum of votes] for PP and PSOE in terms of total votes.

As shown in this figure, if we add the votes to the two main political parties, PP and PSOE, they received over 70 % of the total of votes in every election –since 1996 until 2011– 2008 is the year that represents the clearest manifestation of the two-party dominance: the PP and PSOE together obtained 21.5 million votes of the total –of almost 26 million voters.

The Emergence of New Parties

Undoubtedly, this data provides evidence to the hypothesis of the crisis –and changes– in Spanish representation system. The correlation analysis that we have run establishes that higher numbers of demonstrations in a city during this cycle can predict the emergence of more political parties competing for the votes in that constituency. But we still have to link the involvement in the protest to changes in electoral preference. As we have seen, protestors shouted in the squares “they don’t represent us”; but then, did they also express it in the ballots? Here, considering the link between involvement in protest and changes in electoral behaviour is productive. Galais analyses this issue, precisely, considering 15M protesters involvement, and she argues that “...although 15M used protest repertoire actions and played on individuals’ feelings of political

disaffection it also articulated the idea that it was important for citizens to be engaged in politics by all means” (Galais, 2014, p. 335). She also establishes that involvement in activities link to protest increases individuals’ levels of political competence, which may explain that “the perceived importance of voting may actually have increased for protesters as compared to before they joined the movement” (Galais, 2014, p. 341).

On the 22nd of May 2011 municipal elections, at the height of the 15M movement, blank votes exceeded two and a half points (584,012) and came close to a million people when adding null votes. This evidence may represent “increased withdrawal” from the two-party model of Spanish political representation and the spreading of the winds of change in Spanish society. One could trace support for the 15M movement through different indicators: the rise of blank and null votes –in the 2011 municipal¹¹ and 2014 European parliamentary elections–, while in the 2011 General Election this was mainly reflected in the number of process abstentions –two points increase; 1 400 000 people more than in 2008 decided not to vote. In addition, for this same election, other parties such as *Izquierda Unida* –IU, a left-wing non-mainstream party– and *Unión Progreso y Democracia* –UPyD, a right-wing non-mainstream party– summed up to 670 000 more votes than in the same election in 2008, when UPyD did not even compete at local level because it had been recently created.

In this context, *Podemos* was founded in January 2014 to participate in the European Parliamentary (EP) elections. This was an important decision because the 2014 EP electoral context was an opportunity to avoid the “side effects” of the Spanish electoral system for the General Election: for European elections, there is a single constituency which facilitates a proportional representation of votes and could challenge the predominance of the traditional parties (Castells, 2016, p. 171); on the other hand, this election usually has a lower level of participation. Additionally, obtaining gains in votes in this election generated financial resources to be competitive in other elections. So, the 2014 European Parliamentary elections offered the possibility to insert new demands and political identities into the system: electoral empowerment. *Podemos* was presented as a “participatory method open to the whole citizenry” and announced their intention to fulfil the conditions that would allow them to compete in the EP elections:¹² Pablo Iglesias began his intervention by saying: *En las plazas dijeron que sí se puede y nosotros decimos hoy que Podemos*.¹³ This was a way to connect directly, without any intermediary, with the feelings and demands that had been expressed through the unprecedented cycle of mobilization.

11. Although turnout was three points higher than in the former municipal elections in 2007.

12. To watch the whole press conference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNOsg6KF3Ts>

13. This Spanish quote translates as: “In the squares it was said that it is possible and today we say that we can.”

Ideological Contention for “Outraged Imaginary”

After the success of *Podemos* in the 2014 election, discomfort grew among conservative and pro-business groups, e.g. by June 2014, Josep Oliu, President of Banco Sabadell, expressed the need for a “right-wing *Podemos*”, because, he “joked”, “*Podemos* scares us a little...”¹⁴ By January 2015, just before the campaign for local and autonomic elections, *Ciudadanos* (C’s), a party created in 2005 in Catalonia, reappeared in the national context and started to grow in the polls. Although it is a common belief, never confirmed, that *Ciudadanos* is the “IBEX 35¹⁵ option” to compete with *Podemos*, the fight against corruption has always been a *leitmotiv* of *Ciudadanos* electoral campaigns: PP’s corruption scandals and the reorganization of the electorate, scared the great Spanish firms in the IBEX 35 and encouraged them to try to stop *Podemos* from growing, and present voters with a new right wing electoral option.

Marzolf and Ganuza state that ‘after the municipal and regional elections of May 2015, what we can visualize is that the insistence on converting 15M into a political actor has resulted in an electoral competition that has placed the *outraged imaginary* in the middle of the fight for votes’ (2015, p. 107). In 2016 there were two main political parties in that competition, *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*. But, after both general elections that took place that year, *Podemos* has been more and more institutionalised and associated with classic left parties, losing its initial transversality. Especially after forming an alliance with *Izquierda Unida* –the communist party.

Also, *Ciudadanos* has, more and more, been leaning towards the right. An example is the entrance in the Andalusian regional government with PP and supported by a new far right party, VOX. All together this created a window of opportunity taken advantage of by the far-right party to enter the contention for voters represented by this outraged imaginary, but electorally orphaned after *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*’ institutionalization and polarization. What has happened in the 2019 General Election? VOX became the third parliamentary force, offering a discourse about freedom as the main change element, and fuelled by the direct confrontation against the Catalan Independence.

As seen above, if we take a look at the voter’s profiles in both General Elections there is evidence that there are differences between the traditional political parties’ voters (PP and PSOE) and those voting for new parties –*Podemos*, *Ciudadanos* and later VOX. The greater differences are observed in demographic characteristics such as age and education level in both General Elections. New parties gather more voters around

14. <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/politica/josep-oliu-propone-crear-una-especie-Podemos-derechas-3329695>

15. The benchmark stock market index of *Bolsa de Madrid*.

younger, urban and highly educated people. While traditional parties obtain more votes from people over 55 years old, with lower education levels and living in smaller towns.

Although, the emergence of VOX in November's 2019 General election, did introduce changes, mainly in the sizes of towns and cities of the voters, eliminating the urban characteristic of the new parties' profiles. Age and studies were quite similar to the voters of the other two new political parties. This meant that age and studies were the main differential characteristics between old and new political parties.

A possible explanation for these changes could be that there is a generational gap in the relationship with existing political parties and political cultures. This rupture is particularly with parties forged during the Spanish *Transición*; with its political culture based on fear and political stability as a main goal. Specifically, this relates to the fear of speaking out about anything related to politics after 40 years of dictatorship and the fear of possibly returning to that, given the unstable political situation. This fear was combined with the fear of ETA's terrorism (Manganas, 2016). Fear has become a political style of governance, brought back during the economic crisis by both PP and PSOE: fear of economic and political intervention by international institutions –the Troika–, and losing the precarious welfare state or fear of losing pensions. As opposed to the political culture arisen from the economic crisis and the 15M based on transparency, free of corruption and direct radical democracy.

Conclusion

As stated above, this paper analyses the breakdown of the Spanish two-party system and questions the current relationship with the “cycle of mobilization”: are both events independent one of each other or, on the other hand, are they an expression of the same underlying process? We have argued that both events express “exhaustion” with the Spanish political system characterised by the prevalence of two parties in national level and several parties in some autonomies –predominantly in Catalonia, Basque Country, Galicia and Andalucía–.

The 15M mobilization was the first expression of political reorganization in Spain. The cycle of mobilization (2011-2014) revealed the lack of capacity of the existing political parties to represent shifting political identities. This expression was reaffirmed by the successful emergence of *Podemos* –and the reactive revitalization of *Ciudadanos* -C's. This shift was rooted in changes in the social base of the electorate and capitalised on disappointment and indignation and transformed them into political aspirations. We argue that adherence to political parties has changed in Spain as a result of the cycle of mobilization: the two-party

system, the PP and the PSOE have lost 8.2 million votes and 101 seats in Congress—comparing vote results in the 2008 and 2016 elections—, whilst two new electoral options, *Unidos Podemos*—the result of the coalition between *Podemos* and *Izquierda Unida*— and *Ciudadanos*, gathered eight million votes and 93 seats. These losses were increased in November 2019: in relation to 2008 results, PP and PSOE obtained near 10 million votes less and 114 less seats.

Analysing these changes using Felix Kolb's partial theory, which explains how social movements achieve political changes, we argue that the cycle of protest has produced three political consequences through two causal mechanisms: agenda impact and emergence of new political parties, through disruption; leading to strengthening Parliamentary representation due to electoral empowerment.

The disruption causal mechanism is evidenced by two political consequences, agenda impact and the emergence of new political parties. *Podemos*, emerged as a result of the cycle, and *Ciudadanos* as a reaction to *Podemos*' success, as well as a non-leftist option. Although this paper has not analysed changes in the political agenda resulting from this cycle of mobilization because it is beyond its scope, there is some evidence that points to social movements, especially 15M and the *Tides*, having been able to modify societal perception towards a number of topics—introducing onto political agendas demands made during the cycle of protests. For instance, the increasing perception of corruption as a serious problem for Spanish society—and some minimal changes seen in the way that political parties manage it—C's and coalitions—; and, as shown in polls, growing public concern about the quality of democracy and the political class in Spain: a discourse brought by the 15M that has been rescued by VOX in the last November 2019 General Election, after the loss of the initial transversality of *Podemos*, and *Ciudadanos*' radical right turn.

We argue that these political consequences are proven by our two hypotheses. The first states that an increase in the number of mobilizations means a greater probability of new parties appearing and obtaining political representation. And the second suggests that the social characteristics of those people voting for new parties are similar to those who have been mobilised during the cycle of protest.

The first hypothesis has been tested by conducting a linear regression analysis to measure the relationship between synthetic ad hoc variables, regarding demonstrations and vote for new political parties. This analysis has shown positive correlations which connect demonstrations with the presence of new political parties as well as achieving a percentage of votes for these new parties without regard for the type of election—city council or national parliament. This links social movements to what Kolb called political consequences. Specifically, with two political consequences: the emergence of new parties, and the strengthening of parliamentary representation.

The idea underlying the second hypothesis is that the people who participate in demonstrations share very similar characteristics with those voting later for new parties, such as *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos*. Therefore, in this paper we have analysed the profiles of people who have been very active throughout the cycle of mobilization to compare these with those voters reconfiguring the cleavage between traditional parties and new parties. With those profiles established we have compared them and noted differences and coincidences. As we have shown, there seems to be a strong connection between the cycle of mobilization and the electoral reorganization, especially because people voting for new parties have very similar profiles to those who have been very active in social movements and demonstrations during the cycle. Looking at the profiles of activism and the voters of new parties it is evident that the socio-demographic variables are very similar: mainly young, highly educated and with an occupation status of students, office and service workers, as well as technicians and middle cadres.

However, in order to search for further proof to connect the profiles of protesters and voters, we have looked into the CIS' post electoral survey of 2015, especially the variable "declared vote" in December's General Election. This survey shows that people who have mobilised many times vote for *Podemos* and *Izquierda Unida (IU)*, with a 20 % difference over other political parties. Also, looking into the answer for frequency 'sometimes', the three parties, *Podemos*, *Ciudadanos* and *IU* have similar rates.

This breakdown of this two-party representation marks the degree to which the cycle of mobilization and its institutional representation have shaped the Spanish political context. New parties have provided institutionalised channels for the expression of dissent in respect to current policies and demands about the quality of democracy and social rights. To conclude, we have achieved our main goal, which was to connect the formation of new parties and their electoral success in terms of obtaining votes; all of it as a political consequence of the Spanish cycle of protest.

The last electoral cycle, which began in April 2019, has shown that these changes are consolidating. The 'old' politics (PP and PSOE) has received less support than ever in a general election. Meanwhile, *Podemos* has consolidated its position and entered government. In addition, a new party has become the third most voted party in Congress, *VOX*, an ultranationalist Spanish party which has split right-wing constituency and has diversified voters. Undoubtedly, the Spanish political system is no longer, a two-party system. This is a change that began in the streets.

Declarations of Interest

The authors certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest –such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements–, or non-financial interest –such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs– in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Annex

Figure 6. Identification of Variables

Name	Independent Variable
INVAR1	Difference in mobilizations number (2012-2007)
INVAR2	Difference in mobilizations number (2015-2012)
INVAR3	Difference in mobilizations number (2015-2007)
INVAR4	Difference in registered unemployment (2015-2007)
Name	Dependent Variable
DV1NP	Number of new parties represented in City Councils (2015)
DV2BI	Vote percentage difference for PP-PSOE (2007-2015). Pamplona (UPN-PSN/PSOE)
DV3%NV	Vote percentage for new parties obtaining representation in City Councils (2015)
DV1NPGen	Number of new parties represented in parliament (General Election 2015)
DV2BIGen.	Vote percentage difference for PP-PSOE (General Election 2008-2015)
DV3%NVGen	Vote percentage for new parties obtaining representation in Spanish parliament (General Election 2015)

Source: Author's elaboration.

Figure 7. Complete Results of Correlation Analysis

Correlations								
		INVAR	DV1NP	DV2BII	DV3%NV	DV1NPGen	DV2BIIGen	DV3%NVGen
INVAR1	Pearson's correlation	1	.551**	-.454**	.545**	.443**	-.392**	.480**
	Sig. (bilateral)		.000	.001	.000	.001	.004	.000
	N	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
	R ²		0.304	0.206	0.297	0.196	0.154	0.230
INVAR2	Pearson's correlation	1	-.080	.077	-.043	-.029	.204	-.255
	Sig. (bilateral)		.573	.587	.762	.838	.147	.068
	N	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
	R ²		-	-	-	-	-	-
INVAR3	Pearson's correlation	1	.569**	-.430**	.491**	.625**	-.312*	.477**
	Sig. (bilateral)		.000	.001	.000	.000	.024	.000
	N	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
	R ²		0.324	0.185	0.241	0.391	0.097	0.228
INVAR4	Pearson's correlation	1	.683**	-.361**	.363**	.455**	-.391**	.601**
	Sig. (bilateral)		.000	.009	.008	.001	.004	.000
	N	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
	R ²		0.466	0.130	0.132	0.207	0.153	0.361
** The correlation is significant at level 0.01 (bilateral). * The correlation is significant at level 0.05 (bilateral).								

Source: Author's elaboration.